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ABSTRACT

A "Nutrition and Fitness through Visual Learning Program" is designed to help mentally retarded persons select nutritious foods; prepare a nutritious lunch semi-independently; participate in a daily physical fitness program; and develop auditory comprehension, verbal expression, and communication skills. The project uses an instant camera to visually demonstrate the goals and provide immediate reinforcement. Pictures are used to enhance comprehension, expand expression, and develop communication skills. The pictures help motivate students to practice speech and manual communication. The fitness centers on cardiovascular endurance and weight reduction. (CL)

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1980-3

Instant Pictures Help Mentally Handicapped Develop Independent Living Skills

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Mentally retarded individuals often have difficulty in the areas of independent living skills, fitness, coordination, and communication. This is confirmed by research and is evident at the Rochester School of the Holy Childhood where more than 50% of our population is unable to make a simple meal without extensive assistance. Moreover, students exhibit low levels of physical endurance and have difficulty achieving and maintaining proper weight.

To help remedy these problems, we have started a "Nutrition and Fitness Through Visual Learning Program." The specific objectives of the program are to help students to:

- select nutritious foods;
- prepare a nutritious lunch semi-independently;
- participate in a daily physical-fitness program;
- develop auditory comprehension, verbal expression, and communication skills.



Student documents selection of vegetables with instant picture.



Karen Finnegan, rear, helps student make jam.



Demonstrating student's ability to use chef's knife safely and effectively.

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While it is difficult to provide mentally retarded students with concrete learning opportunities solely by word of mouth or through print, we have found the camera and instant photography extremely useful in providing a creative and flexible opportunity for assessing and developing an individualized program. Specifically, we use the KODAK COLORBURST 250 Instant Camera to demonstrate visually—with immediate reinforcement—the importance of communication skills, good nutrition, and adequate exercise for personal and social self-improvement.

When teaching independent living skills, we use the camera in conjunction with actual practice and experience through planned activities. The students learn about the many interrelationships involved in nutrition such as food choices, purchases, preparation, and consumption. Students plan, purchase, and prepare their own lunches three times a week. Pictures are used to show students the sequential steps involved in the

preparation of a meal—from washing hands to cleaning utensils.

The camera has also been employed successfully by Janice Manolopolus, the speech therapist. The students involved in the program display many varieties and degrees of speech, language, and communication difficulties. We have found that speech and language must be taught in a functional and meaningful context to be successful and to effect good carry-over.

To this end, pictures are used to enhance comprehension, expand expression, and further develop communication skills. The content for both auditory comprehension and verbal expression includes vocabulary building, categorization skills, concept development (such as opposites and reasoning skills), sequencing, and syntax development (such as the correct use of nouns, verbs, objects, and possessives). The camera permits an action to be captured and carefully analyzed by the student without requiring total dependence on memory. For example, by using

pictures students can see: Who is washing her hands? What is she doing? What did she do next?

Pictures also help motivate students to practice vital articulation and manual sign skills, and make these activities more meaningful for the students.

The development of alternate communication skills is also an objective for students who have difficulty with verbal interaction. In this regard, pictures provide an already common experience of two highly motivating subjects—themselves and food! Past events can be more readily communicated as a picture brings a past experience into the present. For students whose sentence length or articulation skills limit intelligibility, photographs provide additional cues for the listener and the speaker, thus easing frustration.

Another area of concern is weight control. Research shows that the proper combination of activity and food intake is the key to successful weight control. Thus, an essential component of the health objective



The moment of accomplishment: Lunch is prepared.



Instant photograph by student reveals instructor helping coordinate arm strokes while others observe.

involves a daily fitness program with the major emphasis directed to cardiovascular endurance and weight reduction. The activities selected are chosen to be of practical use as lifetime recreational skills. Students are involved in jogging, disco exercise, swimming, and cross-country skiing for flexibility. Weight records are kept for each student.

Another significant element in the overall program is the photo manual. Students make photo manuals using pictures and short descriptive sentences to describe the action in each picture. The photo manuals are used for family communication, as accountability devices for teacher objectives, and as guides for students. Also, the photo manuals help parents see what their child was doing during program hours. Sometimes parents have not realized the capabilities of some of these students, and they can witness their progress through the photographs. Most important, the manuals are taken home by the students so they can report their daily achievements.



Student-made instant picture shows fellow students signing: "How is your day?" "Good."



Exercising to the beat of the Bee Gees.